

Diploma thesis – opponent's review

Title of diploma thesis: RECONSTRUCTION STRATEGY AND DESIGN FOR NORTHERN SALTIVKA, KHARKIV

Author: Kateryna Natalchuk

Design studio: Achten–Pavlíček–Sýsová

Supervisor of diploma thesis: prof. Dr. Henri Hubertus Achten

Assistant professor: Ing. arch. M. Arch. Jiří Pavlíček, PhD.

Opponent: Rozálie Kašparová, MSc.

Verbal evaluation

This diploma project tackles a critical and timely theme: the regeneration of modernist housing estates in a post-crisis—specifically post-war—context. The choice of topic is both bold and relevant, engaging with spatial, social, and political complexities while offering a transferable model for the sustainable redevelopment of modernist housing estates anywhere.

The proposal is grounded in a **solid analysis of urban structure and collective memory, yet it thoughtfully addresses the uncertainties of future demographic developments**. The proposed three categories of destruction form a clear framework that allows for the maximum preservation of existing assets while creating space for thoughtful renewal. The core goal of **“repairing rather than replacing”** is essential in maintaining local identity and ensuring emotional continuity for returning residents.

Kateryna proposes a **clear urban strategy centred around a new main axis – the “urban backbone”** – which transforms observed pedestrian flows into a vibrant spine of the neighbourhood. This gesture improves connectivity and creates a legible, multi-functional core that could be adapted to similar modernistic neighbourhoods beyond Kharkiv. The decision to design within the specific pattern of modernist planning, rather than overriding it with “traditional or more popular” urban typologies, reflects deep respect for both local spatial qualities and the lived experiences of residents.

The project emphasises cultural and community-driven elements, such as a new cultural hub that acts as a landmark and natural new centre of the neighbourhood, and a community centre integrated with the church.

The proposal presents a **well-structured system of public spaces that thoughtfully balances accessibility and community engagement**. Green infrastructure is addressed as a connective element within the designated neighbourhood, yet it is not treated as a foundational layer of the proposal. Its role should be further developed, particularly in relation to adjacent neighbourhoods, the surrounding landscape, and the public transportation network - particularly the accessibility of the metro station. Reconsidering how buildings and the public space system connect to the large linear park in the southwest would reinforce connectivity and usability—currently, the proposed street seems redundant and maintains an unnecessary separation between neighbourhoods.

Otherwise **car access is well reorganised**: car streets subdivide the area into smaller zones where cars are restricted, significantly enhancing spatial clarity and reducing the current uncontrolled car

presence. Parking is mainly relocated to the edges of the neighbourhood and integrated under tree canopies, preserving the calm and green character of inner courtyards and ensuring they remain safe, walkable environments—especially for children. A particularly valuable component is the introduction of semi-private gardens surrounding housing blocks - such places promote social interaction among pedestrians, reduce municipal maintenance burdens, and establish an important semi-public layer within the neighbourhood.

The quite substantial densification—another of the project’s core goals—is handled with care: new buildings respect the existing scale (6–9 floors), mixed-use functions are introduced gradually, and the urban design integrates seamlessly into the existing fabric. A proposed phasing strategy acknowledges future demographic uncertainties and offers the flexibility to scale development up or down as needed. However, **greater detail in the phasing stages would strengthen the proposal**—especially in phases 0 and 1, which should outline the first critical steps needed to improve the quality of life for current residents and those planning to return.

Formal and graphic aspects of the project, and completeness

The graphic layout is easy to navigate and the chosen colour scheme demonstrates sensitivity to the subject matter. All key analytical and design components are presented in a clear and logical manner. The renderings could better convey the soft spatial qualities and intended atmosphere of the spaces, as well as reflect the local identity more strongly. Overall, the portfolio is complete, coherent and visually appealing.

Inquiries for the Defense

- What are the key elements of sustainability embedded in your urban design proposal?
- How would you revise the phasing strategy to better align with your goals of economic and social sustainability?
- What role does green infrastructure play in supporting the neighbourhood’s functioning, connectivity, and long-term resilience? How is the proposed neighbourhood connected to adjacent areas, the broader landscape, and the metro system?
- Would you consider redesigning the south-western edge of the neighbourhood—facing the large linear park—as a softer, more integrated transition rather than a standard street? If so, how would you approach this transformation?

Final summary and grade proposal

The urban design proposal is a highly relevant, well-argued and expertly designed diploma project. It combines strategic flexibility with strong spatial sensibility and a deep understanding of modernist urbanism. The “urban backbone” is a powerful structuring concept. Greater attention to green infrastructure and broader territorial context would further strengthen the proposal. Overall, an excellent work with high potential to use in the real world.

Proposed grade: A

V Praze dne 27. 5. 2025

Rozálie Kašparová

